



## Overview

This document summarizes the suggestions, concerns, and comments from four stakeholder groups that were interviewed as part of the Greensville County Comprehensive plan update process. These groups included realtors, developers, business owners, county school and community college representatives, economic development and industry professionals, and county staff from various departments. Individuals and groups were invited by the planning staff, and invitations were distributed to members of the Chamber of Commerce. Thirteen (13) individuals participated in the interviews. Each stakeholder group discussed their professional experiences in the community and shared their perspective related to community strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. The feedback has been summarized by stakeholder group, as outlined below.

## Land Use & Development

### ***Representatives: Realtor, Developer, Business Owner***

#### *Present Benefits and Future Opportunity*

- Land is readily available in a variety of parcel sizes and at a reasonable price compared to places closer to urban areas.
- The area offers more land and a slower way of living.
- Greensville is less expensive for people that are willing to commute to certain amenities.
- People can choose to live in town or outside of town in more rural parts of the county – Greensville offers a wide variety of lifestyle options.
- Access to open land and wildlife makes the quality of life in the county marketable. It is peaceful and quiet with great wildlife, hunting, and fishing.
- Proximity to both the Richmond market and North Carolina along I-95 makes the area attractive for potential business owners.
- There is potential to use the friendliness of the people and their love of the area to help sell the area to others.
- The community is close-knit and is engrained to do good.

#### *Potential Quality of Life Improvements*

- “We have to create our own opportunities.”
- Improve road striping and maintenance. The local roads and highways could be more conducive for future development of neighborhoods and businesses in many parts of the county.
- Build a culture that supports local businesses and entrepreneurship built by local residents in addition to trying to attract new businesses.



- Capture more opportunities from all the people that drive through the county daily on I-95 by make it more appealing to all potential visitors.
- The presence of the airport and the country club are also unique assets for the county that have the potential for more use.
- Take advantage of the at least 50 volunteer organizations that exist in the community. This could include more intentional partnerships among groups to get things done.
- Attract more social gathering spaces of various types (e.g., theaters, recreation, bars) to attract a variety of generations to the area.
- Lots of recreation potential exists, but more public access to natural resources should be prioritized. The Nottoway River is very scenic but needs more public access points to allow residents to easily use this resource. The Meherrin River also has lots of potential as a natural resource if it is restored.
- Expansion of broadband and natural gas would encourage more types of development to locate in the county
- Given the existing school funding structure with the state, the county can consider more creative options and initiatives to make the schools more attractive to existing and potential new residents. Emphasis on keeping students that choose to attend other school systems or private schools.

#### *Land Use and Development Considerations*

- Continue to promote a government that wants to work with people and maintain friendly relationships so that developers feel welcomed to consider projects in the county. The county has a good track record for its licensing and permitting process.
- The areas closer to the city of Emporia are largely accounted for in the growth area within the current Comprehensive Plan, but places like Skippers and Jarratt seem to have the most potential for new growth. The new sewer and water access coming to Skippers makes the area more attractive for growth.
- Residential development should be mixed. There is a need for single family homes on a variety of different lot sizes (0.5 acres to 5 acres). Single family is probably the most desired, so more mixed use or townhomes may not have that much interest.
- Residential lots with proximity to commercial properties could also be considered. Usually 1,500-2,000 sq ft houses are preferred on larger lots of 2+ acres. But in smaller town areas, 0.5-acre parcel sizes makes more sense.
- Encourage more homeownership since a large amount of rental properties exist in the county. For the longevity and prosperity of the community for generations, it is better to have more homeowners. Promote affordable housing because over 60% of the city of Emporia are renters, for example.



- One participant noted that careful consideration should be given to identifying the county as a federally-designated opportunity zone. If industry views the area as disadvantaged, the risk might not be worth the reward. If opportunity naturally exists, then do people want to get bogged down in the red tape of opportunity zones? Conversely, another participant stated that buyers have been attracted to the area specifically because it is a designated opportunity zone.
- Solar development can be more carefully enforced through the zoning ordinance. As an industrial use in rural areas, the county should have a clearer process for approving potential projects based on regulatory standards rather than conditions. Having a fair and consistent process with guidelines makes sense for new solar development.
- The soil quality of the county is quite different with the eastern portion having lower quality coastal plain soils while the western portion of the county has better soil quality since it is the Piedmont. This should be noted when considering new development that requires septic.

#### *Future Strategies*

- Encourage the publication of a county newsletter that keeps residents informed about ongoing county processes.
  - Easier access to information, schedule, and plans of the county to encourage more public involvement.
  - Mentoring programs with local residents and business owners to create and expand local businesses.
- Stimulate a creative mentality that wants to take risks and try new options. Build on the ability to consistently manage daily operations of the county to be more creative.

### Education

#### ***Representatives: Southside Virginia Community College, County Schools***

#### *Present Benefits and Future Opportunity*

- The presence of the industrial megasite, and the proximity to that site will one day reap benefits. That site is unique to the county and makes it more attractive.
- Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC) offers a wide variety of programs for local residents to take advantage of in Greensville County. This includes dual enrollment programs with local high schools, associate's degree programs, skills workshops, and technical classes. The presence of a highly technical machining lab on campus for unique skill classes, the welding lab, and other classroom space are all part of the state of the art SVCC facilities in the county.



- Funding for scholarships for all high school graduates in the county for 1 year at SVCC is unique and distinguishes the county from all others that SVCC serves. It proves a clear dedication by the county in supporting local education programs.
- The presence of career pathway programs that include apprenticeships and other partnerships with companies for mentorship offer a unique opportunity for educational growth in the county.
- Greensville County is one of the best locality partners in the entire SVCC system. It was the first county to provide space for a SVCC center for programs outside of the two dedicated SVCC campuses, which are located elsewhere in the region.
- Greensville has proven to be aggressive in economic development and facilities efforts. They have been diligent in putting in place the infrastructure for future growth.
- The infrastructure and funding is in place to provide a variety of high quality education opportunities for job readiness at SVCC. Additionally, SVCC is willing to be responsive to the needs of potential businesses and industries that want to locate in the county. Program enrollment has been highest when there is a clear pathway to a job in the community.
- Partnerships exist with the local school system to offer dual enrollment programs, local internships with businesses, and accreditation as work ready in the local community.

#### *Challenges*

- The SVCC system is the largest in the state with 10 counties and 42 square miles, so it can be challenging to attract a full cohort of students to fill classes at each center. Transportation to other centers and campuses outside of the county for other types of classes can be challenging.
- SVCC classes in Greensville often follow the ups and downs of jobs and industrial location decisions in the county. Interest in technical classes follows the job market such that interest picks up when demand for jobs is clear. However, many times SVCC struggles to fill many of the technical classes when demand from employers does not exist. Dual enrollment and associate degree programs see the most interest, but SVCC struggles to fill many of the technical classes.
- Greensville County Public Schools (GCPS) is a one high school division, so dependence on individual facilities is particularly important and tenuous.
- A single standalone 5th grade school creates a number of issues, including state accreditation.
- A lack of affordable housing, outside enrichment activities, poor health outcomes, and food access create challenges in the school environment.
- Lack of internet across the county presents challenges for offering activities and learning outside of the physical school buildings.



- Fluctuating enrollment in the schools presents a difficult challenge for supporting an efficient learning environment.
- Community dynamics make it difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers for the local school system.

#### *Future Strategies*

- Build a greater emphasis on project-based learning given the large amount of resources that exist throughout the community.
- Support an alternative school setting to provide more options for students that are not successful in a traditional school setting.
- Build an annex on the current elementary school site for 5th graders.
- Greater investment in early childhood programs.
- Create more programs that incentivize teachers to be successful and move to the area.

### Economic Development

#### ***Representatives: Economic Development Director, Business Owner, Human Resources from Local Industry***

#### *Present Benefits and Future Opportunity*

- Drivers to locate here is the low cost of living and operations. Building a large facility in the county is far cheaper than other metro areas.
- Logistics is ideal with I-95 and 58 running through the county, along with rail, easy access to Virginia Port, and 3 international airports within 1.5 hour drive.
- Existing industries include Toll Brothers, FedEx, Haco Works (plastic components), OSG (bullet proof glass and shatter proof glass), CIMC China Intermodal Companies (Parts of shipping containers), and Boars Head Meat provisions in Jarratt.
- The Eagles Scholarship to SVCC for one year for every high school student is terrific and has been expanded to include technical classes in addition to more basic academic classes.
- Optional work ready certification on the local high school diplomas allows businesses to consider interviewing local students based on certified qualifications.
- Greensville County has worked to market the industrial megasite (with regional alliance of 3 localities) to help promote the development of the site. Membership in the Virginia Trade Alliance has also been used to market the site.
- The industrial megasite is now approaching the 10-year timeline that was estimated to get it up to full specs to make it the most attractive. It is now completely ready as a Tier 4 (out of 5) meaning it has the necessary utilities. It only lacks a physical pad since the county is unsure of size or location. The total site is 1600 acres, but it was determined to



promote as multiple 200 to 500-acre parcels. The county prefers numerous large industries instead of one huge one. The megasite has good transportation access to Virginia Port and includes a rail turnout.

### *Challenges*

- More funding for marketing is needed for the mega-site.
- CSX spurs are mostly maxed out in the county, but a few turnouts with access still do exist. Norfolk Southern line is now shut down and is vacant but has direct access to the port if it is ever reopened. Without rail access, trucks are the main option for transportation.
- Need to create a different smaller industrial center for smaller 25 to 50-acre industrial sites. One site is currently ready to go at 25 acres with another 45-acre site that needs more development. A new industrial park could be created just to the north of the current one, which is on private land.
- The overall lack of a skilled and/or willing workforce makes business attraction strategies difficult.
- Southside Virginia is unable to compete with Central Virginia for recruiting the top companies and industries. This means that attraction efforts must be strategic in recruiting potential businesses.
- Challenge of natural gas access to many potential sites (3 lines run through the county, but cost to connect clients is very high). Need for natural gas is very typical for industry, but tapping into line and building it out can be very costly.
- Upgrades to Route 58 are still needed (see Route 58 Arterial Management Plan), it is considered a significant tourism corridor and a key freight corridor serving the Port of Virginia, but there is some town opposition.
- Solar is not a financially viable asset in current format. Not necessarily viewed as economic development. If it is more viable or were to provide more permanent jobs, then it could be considered as a part of economic development.
- Skillset, technology, public transportation, and child care are some of the biggest issues that employers in the county face when attracting and retaining employees.
- Industrial managers are unlikely to live in the community because of a lack of resources and amenities.
- More small businesses are needed to improve quality of life, but they need support (population and buy local culture) to succeed.
- Amenities needed for quality of life improvement, such as childcare and recreational facilities, are not financially feasible due to operation costs versus the population and income.
- Agriculture is still considered an economic player even with recent down turns in soybean and tobacco production.
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### *Strategies*

- There is interest in the creation of a business incubator (COVID cut short previous efforts to get this idea off the ground) and other entrepreneurial support such as business coaching or mentoring.
- Work with VDOT to improve traffic flow on US Route 58. Localities can apply for VDOT funds to make improvements to eliminate signalized intersections to speed up traffic. However, the city of Emporia would be opposed to eliminating signals within the city.
- Take advantage of the Golden Leaf Commons space. More services should be offered to maximize capacity and opportunity of facilities.
- The opportunity of dual enrollment and technical classes at SVCC is high, therefore efforts to support increased enrollment in these classes should be emphasized. Efforts may include promoting the employment/salary opportunities available to skilled workers.
- More indoor recreation space to support activities and organizational spirit is needed in the county
- Better coordination between industries and the local education system could provide a more streamlined employment process.
- Expansion of broadband is necessary for promotion of entrepreneurship in the county.
- Expansion of public transportation operations to industrial centers, and childcare offerings would improve ability to fill more jobs in the county.

### Agriculture

***Representatives: None in Attendance***